

Board Meeting Recap: Oct 2020

SMGWA Board Explores Private Well Owner Role

Santa Margarita Groundwater Agency continues its work to develop the Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP), a requirement of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SMGA), due in early 2022.

The agency's October board meeting was held Thursday, Oct. 22. The meeting, including public comment and participation on agenda items, again was conducted via all-remote, web- and phone-based access due to the coronavirus outbreak.

At the meeting, the board took a deeper look at the role of private well owners within the Santa Margarita Groundwater Basin (SMGB). Private well owners (PWOs) include so-called de minimis pumpers, which are those who operate a well that pumps 2 acre-feet or less per year for domestic purposes. SMGWA has generally accepted that a well serving one to four household connections is likely a de minimis pumper. The role of PWOs has been a part of the discussion since SMGWA was created in 2017, including the impacts to and benefits from de minimis pumping, what role owners or managers should have in the SMGA process, if fees would be applied and, if so, what those fees would be and who would pay them.

The staff will focus on further investigating the role of PWOs during the next several months by using modeling to examine their relationship to the groundwater sustainability indicators of the basin such as depletion of interconnected surface water and degraded water quality. The benefits to PWOs from potential SMGWA projects or management actions also will be reviewed and quantified. A special PWO community meeting is planned for Wednesday, Dec. 2, to engage the stakeholders and inform them about the status of the GSP. The meeting will be conducted in a virtual format and the details for the meeting will be posted on www.smgwa.org as well as shared via various communication channels.

At the October meeting, the board also received a previously requested clarification about the term "undue financial burden," as used in the statements of significant and unreasonable conditions. In this context, the term refers to a cost or financial impact that is unwarranted, inappropriate or excessive, and is the result of an action or inaction by SMGWA or basin groundwater users.

In addition, the Board continued its work developing a statement of significant and unreasonable conditions for depletion of interconnected surface water (groundwater and surface water are interconnected resources because much of the flow in streams is sustained by the discharge of groundwater, particularly during dry periods), and received presentations about historical water budget, and proposed project and management actions model scenarios.

The next SMGWA Board of Directors meeting will be held Monday, Nov. 16 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will be held earlier in the month than normal to accommodate the Thanksgiving holiday. More information at www.smgwa.org.